

**IN THE CLAIMS:**

1. 1. (Currently Amended) A method for operating a data storage system, comprising:
  2. creating a writable virtual disk (vdisk) at a selected time, the writable vdisk referencing changes in data stored in the data storage system after the writable vdisk was created;
  5. maintaining a backing store, the backing store referencing data stored in the data storage system which has not been changed since the writable vdisk was created;
  7. loading blocks of the writable vdisk ~~from a disk~~ into a memory, the loaded blocks including a writable vdisk indirect block having a plurality of fields, each field storing a valid pointer to a data block or an invalid pointer representing a particular hole of a plurality of holes, where each hole instructs the data storage system to examine a corresponding virtual block number pointer in the backing store;
  12. loading blocks of the backing store ~~from a disk~~ into the memory, the loaded blocks including a backing store indirect block having a plurality of fields, each backing store indirect block field corresponding to a field of the writable vdisk indirect block, one or more backing store indirect block fields having a pointer to a data block;
  16. searching each field of the writable vdisk indirect block for a hole; and
  17. replacing each field having a hole in the writable vdisk indirect block with a new pointer to the data block referenced by the corresponding backing store indirect block field to update the writable vdisk to reference both the data which is unchanged since the writable vdisk was created and the data which has been changed since the writable vdisk was created.
1. 2. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising:
  2. dirtying the data block pointed to by the backing store indirect block to enable write allocation of the dirty data block without altering a data content of the data block.
1. 3. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising:

2        choosing a new pointer for a newly allocated data block containing an unaltered  
3        data content;  
4        setting bits in block allocation structures for the newly allocated data block; and  
5        placing the new pointer to the newly allocated data block into the field of the  
6        writable vdisk indirect block to replace the hole.

1        4. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 3 further comprising:  
2        freeing the dirty data block; and  
3        writing the newly allocated data block to disk.

1        5. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 4 further comprising:  
2        releasing an association of the writable vdisk to the backing store to thereby  
3        separate the writable vdisk data blocks from the backing store data blocks.

1        6. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the pointers contained in the writable  
2        vdisk indirect block fields and the backing store indirect block fields comprise logical  
3        volume block numbers (VBNs).

1        7. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the invalid pointers contained in the  
2        writable vdisk indirect block fields comprise a zero logical volume block number (VBN).

1        8. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the plurality of fields in the writable  
2        vdisk indirect block are a writable vdisk level 1 buffer and the plurality of fields in the  
3        backing store indirect block are a backing store level 1 buffer.

1        9. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for operating a computer database,  
2        comprising:  
3        a writable virtual disk (vdisk) created at a selected time, the writable vdisk  
4        referencing changes in data stored in a data storage system after the writable vdisk was  
5        created;

6           a backing store, the backing store referencing data stored in the data storage  
7 system which has not been changed since the writable vdisk was created;  
8           a backdoor message handler adapted to load blocks of the writable vdisk and  
9 backing store ~~from disk~~ into a memory of the storage system;  
10          a writable vdisk indirect block in the memory having a plurality of fields, each  
11 field storing a valid pointer to a data block or an invalid pointer representing a particular  
12 hole of a plurality of holes, where each hole instructs the data storage system to examine  
13 a corresponding virtual block number pointer in the backing store;  
14          a backing store indirect block in the memory having a plurality of fields, each  
15 backing store indirect block field corresponding to a field of the writable vdisk indirect  
16 block, each backing store indirect block field having a pointer to a data block;  
17          a special loading function for searching each field of the writable vdisk indirect  
18 block for one or more fields representing a hole; and  
19          a write allocator for replacing each field representing a hole in the writable vdisk  
20 indirect block with a new pointer to the data referenced by the corresponding backing  
21 store indirect block field to update the writable vdisk to reference both the data which is  
22 unchanged since the writable vdisk was created and the data which has been changed  
23 since the writable vdisk was created.

1       10. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 9 wherein the write allocator  
2 further comprises:  
3           a new pointer for a newly allocated data block containing an unaltered data  
4 content, set bits in block allocation structures for the newly allocated data block, and  
5 place the new pointer to the newly allocated data block into the field of the writable vdisk  
6 indirect block to replace the hole.

1       11. (Original) The apparatus of claim 10 wherein the write allocator is further  
2 adapted to:  
3           free the dirty data block and write the newly allocated data block to disk.

1 12. (Original) The apparatus of claim 9 wherein the backdoor message handler loads  
2 the blocks of the writable vdisk and the blocks of the backing store during periods of  
3 reduced processing activity.

1 13. (Original) The apparatus of claim 9 wherein the pointers contained in the  
2 writable vdisk indirect block fields and the backing store indirect block fields comprise  
3 logical volume block numbers (VBNs).

1 14. (Original) The apparatus of claim 9 wherein the invalid pointers contained in the  
2 writable vdisk indirect block fields comprise a zero logical volume block number (VBN).

1 15. (Original) The apparatus of claim 9 wherein the plurality of fields in the writable  
2 vdisk indirect block comprises a writable vdisk level 1 buffer and the plurality of fields in  
3 the backing store indirect block comprises a backing store level 1 buffer.

1 16-18. (Cancelled).

1 19. (Currently Amended) A data storage system apparatus, comprising:  
2 means for creating a writable virtual disk (vdisk) at a selected time, the writable  
3 vdisk referencing changes in data stored in the data storage system after the writable  
4 vdisk was created;

5 means for maintaining a backing store, the backing store referencing data stored  
6 in the data storage system which has not been changed since the writable vdisk was  
7 created;

8 means for loading blocks of the writable vdisk ~~from a disk~~ into a memory, the  
9 loaded blocks including a writable vdisk indirect block having a plurality of fields, each  
10 field storing a valid pointer to a data block or an invalid pointer representing a particular  
11 hole of a plurality of holes, where each hole instructs the data storage system to examine  
12 a corresponding virtual block number pointer in the backing store;

13       means for loading blocks of the backing store ~~from a disk~~ into the memory, the  
14    loaded blocks including a backing store indirect block having a plurality of fields, each  
15    backing store indirect block field corresponding to a field of the writable vdisk indirect  
16    block, one or more backing store indirect block fields having a pointer to a data block;  
17       means for searching each field of the writable vdisk indirect block for a hole; and  
18       means for replacing each field having a hole in the writable vdisk indirect block  
19    with a new pointer to the data block referenced by the corresponding backing store  
20    indirect block field to update the writable vdisk to reference both the data which is  
21    unchanged since the writable vdisk was created and the data which has been changed  
22    since the writable vdisk was created .

1    20. (Currently Amended) A computer readable medium containing executable,  
2    including program instructions executing on a computer, the program instructions  
3    including instructions for performing the steps of executed by a processor, comprising:  
4       creating program instructions that create a writable virtual disk (vdisk) at a  
5    selected time, the writable vdisk referencing changes in data stored in a data storage  
6    system after the writable vdisk was created;  
7       maintaining program instructions that maintain a backing store, the backing store  
8    referencing data stored in the data storage system which has not been changed since the  
9    writable vdisk was created;  
10      loading program instructions that load blocks of the writable vdisk ~~from a disk~~  
11    into a memory, the loaded blocks including a writable vdisk indirect block having a  
12    plurality of fields, each field storing a valid pointer to a data block or an invalid pointer  
13    representing a particular hole of a plurality of holes, where each hole instructs the data  
14    storage system to examine a corresponding virtual block number pointer in the backing  
15    store;  
16      loading program instructions that load blocks of the backing store ~~from a disk~~ into  
17    the memory, the loaded blocks including a backing store indirect block having a plurality  
18    of fields, each backing store indirect block field corresponding to a field of the writable

19 vdisk indirect block, one or more backing store indirect block fields having a pointer to a  
20 data block;

21 ~~searching program instructions that search~~ each field of the writable vdisk indirect  
22 block for a hole; and

23 ~~replacing program instructions that replace~~ each field having a hole in the writable  
24 vdisk indirect block with a new pointer to the data block referenced by the corresponding  
25 backing store indirect block field to update the writable vdisk to reference both the data  
26 which is unchanged since the writable vdisk was created and the data which has been  
27 changed since the writable vdisk was created-.

1 21-22. (Cancelled).

1 23. (Previously Presented) A method for operating a data storage system,  
2 comprising:

3 creating a writable virtual disk (vdisk) at a selected time, the writable vdisk  
4 referencing changes in data stored in the data storage system after the writable vdisk was  
5 created, the writable vdisk having a plurality of holes where each hole instructs the  
6 storage system to examine a corresponding virtual block number pointer in a backing  
7 store;

8 maintaining the backing store, the backing store referencing the data stored in the  
9 data storage system which has not been changed since the writable vdisk was created;

10 searching each field of the writable vdisk for a hole; and

11 referencing each hole in the writable vdisk to point to the data block referenced by  
12 the corresponding backing store indirect block to update the writable vdisk to reference  
13 both the data which is unchanged since the writable vdisk was created and the data which  
14 has been changed since the writable vdisk was created.

1 24. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 23, further comprising:

2 dirtying the data block pointed to by the backing store indirect block to enable  
3 write allocation of the dirty data block without altering a data content of the data block.

1 25. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 23 further comprising:  
2 choosing a new pointer for a newly allocated data block containing an unaltered  
3 data content;  
4 setting bits in block allocation structures for the newly allocated data block; and  
5 placing the new pointer to the newly allocated data block into the field of the  
6 writable vdisk indirect block to replace the hole.

1 26. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 25, further comprising:  
2 freeing the dirty data block; and  
3 writing the newly allocated data block to disk.

1 27. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 26 further comprising:  
2 releasing an association of the writable vdisk to the backing store to thereby  
3 separate the writable vdisk data blocks from the backing store data blocks.

1 28. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 23, further comprising:  
2 including logical volume block numbers (VBNs) in the pointers contained in the  
3 writable vdisk indirect block fields and the backing store indirect block fields.

1 29. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 23, further comprising:  
2 using a zero logical volume block number (VBN) as the invalid pointers  
3 contained in the writable vdisk indirect block fields.

1 30. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 23, further comprising:  
2 using a writable vdisk level 1 buffer for the plurality of fields in the writable vdisk  
3 indirect block and using a backing store level 1 buffer for the plurality of fields in the  
4 backing store indirect block.

- 1 31. (Previously Presented) A data storage system, comprising:
  - 2 a writable virtual disk (vdisk) created at a selected time, the writable vdisk
  - 3 referencing changes in data stored in the data storage system after the writable vdisk was
  - 4 created, the writable vdisk having a plurality of holes, each hole instructing the storage
  - 5 system to examine a corresponding virtual block number pointer in a backing store;
  - 6 the backing store referencing data stored in the data storage system which has not
  - 7 been changed since the writable vdisk was created;
  - 8 a processor to search each field of the writable vdisk for a hole; and
  - 9 the processor to reference each hole in the writable vdisk to point to the data
  - 10 block referenced by the corresponding backing store indirect block to update the writable
  - 11 vdisk to reference both the data which is unchanged since the writable vdisk was created
  - 12 and the data which has been changed since the writable vdisk was created.
- 1 32. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 31, further comprising:
  - 2 the data block pointed to by the backing store indirect block are dirtied to enable
  - 3 write allocation of the dirty data block without altering a data content of the data block.
- 1 33. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 31 further comprising:
  - 2 a new pointer chosen for a newly allocated data block containing an unaltered
  - 3 data content;
  - 4 bits are set in a block allocation structures for the newly allocated data block; and
  - 5 a new pointer to the newly allocated data block placed into a field of the writable
  - 6 vdisk indirect block to replace the hole.
- 1 34. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 33, further comprising:
  - 2 the dirty data block is freed; and
  - 3 the newly allocated data block is written to disk.
- 1 35. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 34 further comprising:
  - 2 an association of the writable vdisk to the backing store is released to thereby

3 separate the writable vdisk data blocks from the backing store data blocks.

1 36. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 31, further comprising:  
2 logical volume block numbers (VBNs) included in the pointers contained in the  
3 writable vdisk indirect block fields and the backing store indirect block fields.

1 37. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 31, further comprising:  
2 a zero logical volume block number (VBN) used as the invalid pointers contained  
3 in the writable vdisk indirect block fields.

1 38. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 31, further comprising:  
2 a writable vdisk level 1 buffer used for the plurality of fields in the writable vdisk  
3 indirect block and a backing store level 1 buffer used for the plurality of fields in the  
4 backing store indirect block.

1 39. (Currently Amended) A computer readable media, ~~comprising:~~  
2 ~~—said computer readable media containing executable program instructions for~~  
3 ~~execution on~~~~executed by~~ a processor for a ~~method of~~ method for operating a data storage  
4 system, the method having, ~~comprising:~~

5 ~~creating program instructions that create~~ a writable virtual disk (vdisk) at a  
6 selected time, the writable vdisk referencing changes in data stored in ~~the~~a data storage  
7 system after the writable vdisk was created, the writable vdisk having a plurality of holes  
8 where each hole instructs the storage system to examine a corresponding virtual block  
9 number pointer in a backing store;

10 ~~maintaining program instructions that maintain~~ the backing store, the backing  
11 store referencing data stored in the data storage system which has not been changed since  
12 the writable vdisk was created;

13 ~~searching program instructions that search~~ each field of the writable vdisk for a  
14 hole; and

15        ~~referencing~~ program instructions that reference each hole in the writable vdisk to  
16    point to the data block referenced by the corresponding backing store indirect block to  
17    update the writable vdisk to reference both the data which is unchanged since the writable  
18    vdisk was created and the data which has been changed since the writable vdisk was  
19    created.

1    40. (Previously Presented) A method for operating a data storage system,  
2    comprising:

3        creating a writable virtual disk (vdisk) at a selected time, the writable vdisk  
4    referencing changes in data stored in the data storage system after the writable vdisk was  
5    created, the writable vdisk having a plurality of holes where each hole instructs the data  
6    storage system to examine a corresponding virtual block number pointer in a backing  
7    store;

8        maintaining the backing store, the backing store referencing the data stored in the  
9    data storage system which has not been changed since the writable vdisk was created;

10        searching, by a background task process, each field of the writable vdisk for a  
11    hole; and

12        referencing each hole in the writable vdisk to point to the data block referenced by  
13    the corresponding backing store indirect block to update the writable vdisk to reference  
14    both the data which is unchanged since the writable vdisk was created and the data which  
15    has been changed since the writable vdisk was created.

1    41. (Previously Presented) A data storage system, comprising:

2        a writable virtual disk (vdisk) created at a selected time, the writable vdisk  
3    referencing changes in data stored in the data storage system after the writable vdisk was  
4    created, the writable vdisk having a plurality of holes where each hole instructs the data  
5    storage system to examine a corresponding virtual block number pointer in the backing  
6    store;

7        the backing store referencing the data stored in the data storage system which has  
8    not been changed since the writable vdisk was created;

9           a background task processor to search each field of the writable vdisk for a hole;  
10          and

11           the background task processor to reference each hole in the writable vdisk to point  
12          to the data block referenced by the corresponding backing store indirect block to update  
13          the writable vdisk to reference both the data which is unchanged since the writable vdisk  
14          was created and the data which has been changed since the writable vdisk was created.

1       42. (Currently Amended) A computer readable media, ~~comprising:~~  
2       ~~—said computer readable media containing executable program instructions for~~  
3       ~~execution on~~executed by a processor for a method of method for operating a data storage  
4       ~~system, the method having, comprising:~~

5           creating program instructions that create a writable virtual disk (vdisk) at a  
6          selected time, the writable vdisk referencing changes in data stored in ~~the-a~~ data storage  
7          system after the writable vdisk was created, the writable vdisk having a plurality of holes  
8          where each hole instructs the data storage system to examine a corresponding virtual  
9          block number pointer in a backing store;

10           maintaining program instructions that maintain the backing store, the backing  
11          store referencing the data stored in the data storage system which has not been changed  
12          since the writable vdisk was created;

13           searching program instructions that search, by a background task process, each  
14          field of the writable vdisk for a hole; and

15           referencing program instructions that reference each hole in the writable vdisk to  
16          point to the data block referenced by the corresponding backing store indirect block to  
17          update the writable vdisk to reference both the data which is unchanged since the writable  
18          vdisk was created and the data which has been changed since the writable vdisk was  
19          created.